

USING THE MYERS-BRIGGS TYPE INDICATOR
TO DEVELOP BETTER LEADERS IN THE
MASON CITY FIRE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

An essential part of leadership is not only understanding ourselves, but understanding those we are expected to lead. Only by being aware of how others comprehend and communicate can we effectively lead. The fire service has not been effective in training fire fighters to become capable officers. The Mason City Fire Department (MCFD) feels it is a fundamental component of leadership to provide the proper training.

The purpose of this research paper was to give our personnel an opportunity to get a closer look at how they choose different preferences in their lives. The preferences have to do with where they get their energy, how they gather information, how they make decisions and what type of life they choose to adopt. This was done using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) survey to identify a set of preferences.

Evaluative research methodology was used to answer the following questions:

1. Would the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for personality profiling provide valuable information for understanding our members?
2. How can we effectively use this information to benefit both the employee and the leadership staff?
3. Does profiling employees personalities have its place and is it useful to the fire service?

The research information was gathered through many different sources. A literature review was done at the Learning Resource Center at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, along with an extensive search at the Mason City Public Library, in Mason City, Iowa, and on the internet. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was also offered to all employees of the MCFD of which 32 of 34 personnel took part.

All the research indicated that the MBTI would be a useful tool in helping those in leadership positions to better understand themselves and those they lead. With the breakdown by battalion we were able to give a better reflection of the strengths in different areas from each shift.

It is recommended that all new members of our department be offered the opportunity to take the MBTI survey and to educate all members about the ability to use the insight to create a more cohesive work environment.

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INTRODUCTION

“ The Business of leaders, of heroes, is tricky. Leadership is not something that is done to people, like fixing teeth. Leadership is unlocking people’s potential to become better” (Bill Bradley, Former U.S. Senator). Since I began the Executive Fire Officer Program four years ago it has motivated me to really look at our department in terms of leadership training. The Mason City Fire Department (MCFD) and the fire service in general has fallen short in developing effective leaders through formalized executive development. A series of personal evaluations were conducted during the Executive Development & Leadership classes that I attended at the National Fire Academy. It became apparent that in order to be an effective leader, we not only need to understand ourselves, but we need to understand the members of our department. How can we effectively lead someone if we don’t know how they comprehend and respond to our leadership styles.

The purpose of this research project is to study and administer the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and see if information gathered from this indicator could be utilized to better prepare fire officers and battalion members of the Mason City Fire Department to become effective leaders.

An extensive literature review was done using the National Fire Academy’s Learning Resource Center, the Mason City Public Library, the internet, and information received from local mental health officials. Pat Wilson, MSW, a Clinical Social Worker with North Iowa Mercy Health Center, was brought in to administer and rank the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for all MCFD personnel who were interested in taking part in this study. Evaluative research was done to answer the following questions:

1. Would the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for personality profiling provide valuable information for understanding our members?
2. How can we effectively use this information to benefit both the employee and the leadership staff?
3. Does profiling employees personalities have its place and is it useful to the fire service?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Four years ago when I attended the first class of the Executive Fire Officer Program, Executive Development, at the National Fire Academy, it became quite clear that the Fire Service nationwide was going to be facing major changes. It is our responsibility in managing our departments to develop competent leaders to take the fire service forward.

The Mason City Fire Department was established in 1870 and at present employs 34 career firefighters and 1 civilian clerk. The department serves the City of Mason City with 28 square miles and 30 square miles of rural protection. Mason City is the county seat of Cerro Gordo County located in North Central Iowa. Mason City's population is 29,040, however, being the county seat and having several different types of industry, businesses, and a large regional medical facility, our daytime population is between 50,000 and 60,000.

Early in our department's history the MCFD was a leader in the fire service in Iowa. One example of this was being the first city in Iowa to adopt a fire code. It is a

reputation like this that the MCFD would like to continue to earn by implementing needed changes and being open to innovative ideas.

With the appointment of a new fire chief in 1993 our department again made great strides in trying to set the standard for other departments in our area. One area that I feel needs to be addressed is leadership. “Leadership is a process through which an individual influences others toward the accomplishment of common goals” (FEMA, May 2000, pg. SM 2-3). This definition from our *Executive Leadership Manual* cannot be attained unless we take the time to understand the people whom we are expected to lead. Only by understanding how people process information can we effectively manage them. With this decided, it was determined to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to take the first step of gathering information on how the employees process and gather information.

This research is relevant to the Executive Leadership course in reference to the chapter, **Developing Self As A Leader**, by helping to identify behavior differences in personnel of the Mason City Fire Department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was undertaken to better understand how we interact with employees and the citizens we serve. Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers (1993) in their book “Gifts Differing” offer this opinion:

It is fashionable to say that the individual is unique. Each is the product of his or her own heredity and environment and, therefore, is different from everyone else. From a practical standpoint, however, the doctrine of uniqueness is not useful without an exhaustive case study of every person to be educated or counseled or understood. Yet

we cannot safely assume that other people's minds work on the same principles as our own. All too often, others with whom we come in contact do not reason as we reason, or do not value the things we value, or are not interested in what interests us.

This information is the basis for this paper in an effort to better understand employees to make the lines of communication and understanding clearer. To obtain the information that was described above, research was done into the basis of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) was developed by Katherine Cook Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. Mother and daughter were interested in personality in part because of Isabel's boyfriend, Clarence Myers, and his different personality. In their studies they found research that had been done by psychiatrist Carl Jung. Jung's research was done because of his personal and professional separation from Sigmund Freud. Myers and Briggs identified with the Jung theory and added to it with their own research.

The basic preferences are broken down into four areas. ***Energizing*** – is how and from where you get your energy. ***Attending*** – is what you pay attention to when you gather information. ***Deciding*** – is what type of system you use to make decisions. ***Living*** – is what type of life you choose to adopt.

The Energizing Preference, has two ways in which a person can be energized. *Extraversion* is gathering energy from outside of yourself through interaction with other people and activities. *Introversion* is gathering energy from inside yourself through ideas, impressions, and your emotions.

The Attending Preference, has two ways of gathering information. *Sensing* is the preference of looking at what actually exists and using your five senses to gather that

information. *Intuition* is using a sixth sensor or a “gut feeling” to look at what could be, rather than what is.

The Deciding Preference, has two ways to make decisions. *Thinking* is a way of organizing and structuring the information you gather so you can make a decision in an objective and logical manner. *Feeling* is the way you organize and structure information and decisions based on your personal values.

The Living Preferences has two ways to assess the way one’s life is lived. *Judgement* relates to having an organized and planned life. *Perception* relates to being more flexible and spontaneous in living your life. (Hirsh & Kummerow, 1989).

With the four areas of preference are eight different type preferences people could be categorized under and they are as follows: **E** for Extrovert, **I** for Introvert, **S** for Sensing, **N** for Intuitive, **T** for Thinking, **F** for Feeling, **J** for Judgment, and **P** for Perception. When a person has determined their type it will be reflected using a combination of the eight preferences listed above. Because of the eight possible preferences there is a possibility of 16 different personality types. An example would be if you are an Extrovert, Sensing, Feeling, and Perception type person you would have a designation of ESFP. When this designation is established you can then refer to a variety of resources and better understand the meaning of your type. An example of this from the book *Work it Out*, written by Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A.G. Kise, an ESFP has general strengths of “Generous with others, enhancing any workplace where they’re found. Offer grace under pressure, fun-loving. Add enthusiasm, energy, spirit and spunk.”

Below you will find a list of vocabulary to identify the eight preferences taken from the book *Life Types* by Sandra Krebs Hirsh & Jean Kummerow (1989).

ENERGIZING (Orientation of Energy)

Extravert (E)**Introvert (I)**

External.....	Internal
Outside thrust.....	Inside pull
Blurt it out.....	Keep it in
Breadth.....	Depth
Work more with people.....	Work more with ideas
Work more with things.....	Work more with thoughts
Interaction.....	Concentration
Action.....	Reflection
Do-think-do.....	Think-do-think

ATTENDING (Perception)

Sensing (S)**iNtuition (N)**

The five senses.....	Sixth sense, hunches
What is real.....	What could be
Practical.....	Theoretical
Present Orientation.....	Future possibilities
Facts.....	Insights
Using established skills.....	Learning new skills
Utility.....	Newness
Step-by-step.....	Leap around

DECIDING (Judgement)

Thinking (T)**Feeling (F)**

Head.....	Heart
Logical system.....	Value system
Objective.....	Subjective
Justice.....	Mercy
Critique.....	Compliment
Principles.....	Harmony

Reason.....Empathy
 Firm but fair.....Compassionate

LIVING (Orientation to the Outside World)

Judgement (J)

Perception (P)

Planned.....Spontaneous
 Regulate.....Flow
 Control.....Adapt
 Settled.....Tentative
 Run one's life.....Let life happen
 Set goals.....Gather information
 Decisive.....Open
 Organized.....Flexible

By looking at the definite differences from the charts above it is easier to understand how people may react differently to the same situations. "Our challenge is to figure out what types we're talking to and shape our presentations accordingly" (Conger,1998).

Dealing with people, whether in an emergency or with co-workers, is much more effective when you are able to comprehend and appreciate your differences.

PROCEDURES

Research Methodology

The purpose of this paper was to have others in our department better understand why and how they comprehend and communicate with each other. Most importantly was that those in a position of command take the time to learn about more about those they lead in order to do so more effectively. When completing this research project a better understanding of who we are and how we function was learned by those involved. This

was accomplished by having a certified social worker come to the department and teach us about the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. After describing the MBTI she administered the test, graded it, and then returned to explain the results to all those who took part. The procedure used in this paper was evaluative research beginning with a literature review, by gathering information from the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A search of the catalog data included journals, books, and research papers. A search was also done at our local public library in Mason City, Iowa and on the Internet using the Electric Library. The Electric Library is an internet library, which is a paid service, but is offered free of charge to Iowans by the State of Iowa.

Another source of data was from the actual Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test that was given to any employees of the Mason City Fire Department that wanted to take part in this process.

Literature Review

The literature review assessed the information based on the opinions of the authors having experience with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and its use and application. Most of the information pertaining to this research was from those outside of the fire service. All the authors concurred on the differences in how people function based on their type preferences.

Analysis of Data

Thirty-two of thirty-four employees took part in the MBTI survey giving us a 94% participation rate. When the information was processed it was put in tables by rank, not by name, to give most of those involved some confidentiality. Obviously the positions of

Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Records Clerk, and Captains would be easier to figure out because of the limited numbers in our department. The Data was put together by Pat Wilson, a Clinical Social Worker who is certified to train and administer the MBTI test, and was used to help complete the charts in the appendix of this paper.

Assumptions and Liabilities

It was assumed that all members of the MCFD that took part in the MBTI survey understood the survey and the information presented before taking the MBTI. The survey was given only to those members of the MCFD that volunteered to take part.

RESULTS

After looking at the research results from the literature review with information gathered from books and journals, and the MBTI surveys taken by members of our department, I was able to answer the original questions of the study.

Research Question #1: Would the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator for personality profiling provide valuable information for understanding our members?

The Executive Fire Officer Program focuses on developing leaders for the fire service. Part of the process is self-evaluation. Since part of our responsibility is to take what we have learned back to our departments, the need to better understand ourselves is essential. Making use of the MBTI is an effective way of doing this on a local level. In all of the research it is obvious that the information gathered can enlighten us to how people respond to situations. By understanding the differences in how others get their energy, gather information, make decisions, and live their lives can give us the understanding needed to communicate our wants and needs. “Decide what type you are and consider

how that orientation may be shaping your persuasion without your being aware of it.

Decide what types your colleagues are and make sure you give them the kind of material they're programmed to desire" (Conger, 1998). Being able to look at the breakdown of personality types by a department as a whole and more closely by battalion and fire administration we get a better look at the needs of others around us.

Mason City Fire Department MBTI Results:

ISTJ – 25%

ISTP – 3%

ISFJ – 13%

INFP – 6%

INTP – 6%

ESTP – 13%

ESTJ – 13%

ESFP – 6%

ESFJ – 3%

ENTP – 9%

ENTJ – 3%

1st Battalion MBTI Results:

ISTJ – 50%

INTP – 12.5%

ESFJ – 12.5%

ENTP – 12.5%

ENTJ – 12.5%

2nd Battalion MBTI Results:

ISTJ – 20%

ISFJ – 10%

INFP – 10%

ESTP – 30%

ESTJ – 20%

ESFP – 10%

3rd Battalion MBTI Results:

ISTJ – 11%

ISTP – 11%

ISFJ – 22%

INFP – 11%

ESTP – 11%

ESTJ – 22%

ENTP – 11%

Fire Department Administration MBTI Results:

ISTJ – 20%

ISFJ – 20%

INTP – 20%

ESFP – 20%

ENTP – 20%

The results broken down according to the eight preferences are as follows:

Energizing Preference

Introvert – 53%

Extrovert – 47%

Attending Preference

Sensing – 75%

iNtuitive – 25%

Deciding Preference

Thinking – 72%

Feeling – 28%

Living Preference

Judgement – 56%

Perception – 44%

With the breakdown we are more closely divided on the Energizing and Living preferences. However, we are divided almost 3 to 1 in Attending and Deciding preferences. By knowing the difference by battalion and the department as a whole we can educate members as to the most effective way to present information and work together.

Research Question #2: How can we effectively use this information to benefit both the employee and the leadership staff?

With the information that has been collected and the education given to the members of our department, employees have a better understanding of how they operate. With further education, especially to the command staff, we can use the information gathered to effectively communicate our ideas. Through the use of local resources, especially our Regional Medical Center, we can provide constructive leadership tools.

Research Question #3: Does profiling employee's personalities have its place and is it useful to the fire service?

Obtaining insights about our prospective employees by using the MBTI would be beneficial in the hiring process for both the employee and the administration. In an article by Chief Thomas, M. Hawkins Jr., he explains the use of the MBTI for officer training: "At the end of the session, students begin to see themselves and those they work with as people with different strengths and abilities" (Hawkins, 2000, pg.70). The use of self-evaluations is becoming more prevalent within the fire service as we strive to expand our capabilities and see what private business does to succeed. Personality profiling does have its place within the fire service and our fire department.

DISCUSSION

I originally was given the MBTI test as part of an exercise for our Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team. Since we are peers to other emergency responders and we work as a team when conducting a debriefing, knowing the personalities of our team members is helpful. The idea to use the MBTI was one way to allow members of our team to really look at what affects them and how they could use it to be more productive, especially through the use of understanding and communication. Conducting a debriefing requires members who are extroverts to help facilitate the incident discussion. After taking the MBTI survey I felt it could be beneficial for our fire department.

Leadership has been the central focus in the Executive Fire Officer Program. Initially we conducted self-examinations and then began the process of applying that information to how we relate to others and how that impacts our leadership skills. In his book *“The Servant: A Simple Story About The True Essence Of Leadership”*, James C. Hunter gives his definition of leadership: “The skill of influencing people to work enthusiastically toward goals identified as being for the common good”. I feel he is referring to the skill of influencing others in either a positive or negative way to reach our goals can and should be learned.

In Dorothy Leonard’s article, **Putting Your Company’s Whole Brain to Work**, she explains about people understanding each other:

Innovate or fall behind: the competitive imperative for virtually all businesses today is that simple. Achieving it is hard, however, because innovation takes place when different ideas, perceptions, and ways of processing and judging information collide. That, in turn, often requires collaboration among various players who see the world in

inherently different ways. As a result, the conflict that should take place constructively among ideas all too often ends up taking place unproductively among people who do not innately understand one another. Disputes become personal, and the creative process breaks down.

Understanding ourselves is essential in moving forward in the most effective way. In an article by Anna Muoio, she talks with marketing consultant Sandy Fekete. Fekete has this to say “Change comes from awareness, once you figure out who you are, you can begin to differentiate yourself from your competitors”. The fire service has traditionally been an organization based around military origin. In this structure there is basically one person giving orders and others expected to carry out those commands. This is still essential in an emergency incident, however, the majority of time is spent preparing for the incident. Therefore it is important to know those you work with and are expected to lead. “Don’t treat people the way you want to be treated. Tailor communications to the receiver instead of the sender. In a cognitively diverse environment, a message sent is not necessarily a message received. Some people respond well to facts, figures, and statistics, others prefer anecdotes. Still others digest graphic presentations most easily. Information must be delivered in the preferred “language” of the recipient if it is to be received at all” (Leonard, 1997). This is very similar to what we teach in the Incident Command course, that when you are giving information you must have feedback, or the message will get lost and your communication path will break down.

“A lot of firms want teamworking skills, but are not clear about what they mean. Often, they simply want someone who will get along with the rest of the staff without creating friction or making waves. In recruitment terms, a team player is someone who

complements the rest of the team. That might well be the lone worker who seems quiet and introverted but who also has vision and drive and is brave enough to make decisions and suggestions” (Bridge, 2000). So do we strive to get along and have everybody thinking and acting the same? I would think it would be easier, but is it the most effective way to get things done? Having a diverse team is critical in getting the most from your organization. Management has to be willing to use that diversity to their advantage by being open to new ideas.

At first most of the members of our department seemed hesitant to share this information with others. I would like to thank all the members for their participation in this paper and allowing me to use that information for my research. It was quite interesting to listen to the comments after their scores came back and they had their class on what the results meant. Most members gave positive feedback about the MBTI survey and really had a better understanding of themselves and those they work with. All members were given a copy of “Gifts Differing” to use as a reference about their personality types.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The amount of information on this subject is endless. First, I would recommend that all new members of our department be given the opportunity to take the MBTI to have a better understanding of themselves. This would give them the ability to find strengths and weaknesses in how they operate. Secondly, it will be recommended that educational information dealing with the MBTI be incorporated into officer training to allow them to have a better sense of who they are and how they can effectively influence those they will

be in charge of. Most importantly is the ability to have an effective working experience since most of those involved work 24 hour shifts together.

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“Appendices A, B, and C are not included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.fema.gov> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.”

APPENDIX A
MBTI SURVEY

APPENDIX B
GIFTS DIFFERING

APPENDIX C
BATTALION CHARTS